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ABSTRACT

A review of five professional journal articles offers ways of enhancing the teaching of history or political science by allowing students to reach out to primary sources. According to the review, the first article, "The Senior Citizens' Tea: A Connecting Point for Oral History in the Elementary School," by George Bidlake and others, describes a Senior Citizens' Tea, during which elementary-aged students interviewed older members of the community to learn local history. The experience promoted the children's use of language in all forms: listening, speaking, reading, and writing. The review states that the second article, "A Strategy for Using Children's Literature To Extend the Social Studies Curriculum" by John C. Davis, III, and Jesse Palmer, describes a six-step approach to integrating children's literature into the social studies curriculum: (1) state social studies objectives; (2) read social studies textbook selections that address stated objectives; (3) examine the potential sources of literature that supplement the textbook; (4) plan how literature can best be incorporated; (5) incorporate the selected literature into the lesson; and (6) assess the effectiveness of instruction and skill attainment. According to the review, the third article, "Using Informal Writing in Large History Classes: Helping Students To Find Interest and Meaning in History," by Henry Steffens, explains how informal writing might be used to help students explore how history is relevant to them, while the fourth article, "Students as Historians--Writing Their School's History," by Beverly Fazio, explains the process that students go through when they write their own history book about a local building or occurrence. The review states that the fifth article, "Using a Literature-Based Approach to Teaching Social Studies," by Barbara Guzzetti and others, argues that children can acquire a greater understanding of a country like China through the study of literature and other primary sources as opposed to textbooks. (TB)

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Integrating History and Language Arts

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September 30, 1994

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A Senior Citizens' Tea: A Connecting Point for Oral History in the Elementary School.

The Senior Citizens' Tea is about expanding the historical experience for elementary age children through oral history. The focus school in this article had a primary source based local history curriculum, which involved reading and researching both written and three dimensional sources for information. The group of fifth and sixth grade students needed to capture the historical information that many of the community's senior citizens contained in their memories. A senior citizens' tea was held at the school in order to bring the subjects to the children.

The students prepared for the Tea by learning to carry out an interview. This process of preparation included formulating questions, learning to take notes during the interview, and learning to deviate if the subject mentions interesting and unexpected information. The benefits from this project are thoroughly conveyed in the article. Beyond the enhancement of historical understanding, the experience promoted the children's use of language in all forms: listening, speaking, reading and writing. The children also enjoyed the change from the usual classroom routine and the opportunity to communicate and develop relationships with local senior citizens.

This article is a good example of how teachers can integrate history and the language arts. When I initially read the title of this article, many ideas for integration came into my own mind. These ideas all had to do with bringing people, particularly the elderly of the community, into the elementary classroom to tell their personal stories. Their storytelling could be of events from local to world history and about their lives in the different eras through which they lived. I also thought of the many historical stories in literature

that are placed in this century, and how a real "live" person of that time could speak and read to the class.

A vast number of creative approaches are possible within oral history and language arts integration. For teachers and students alike, oral history integrated within the language arts opens doors into exciting adventures and explorations in history. It serves as an excellent way for enhancing and nurturing a meaning centered history curriculum.

A Strategy for Using Children's Literature to Extend the Social Studies Curriculum.

The authors of this article, John C. Davis II and Jesse Palmer, believe that while current instructional approaches seem to be more holistic in nature, little attention has been formally paid to the development of systematic models and strategies of teaching for the social studies. Since textbooks continue to be the main source of curriculum content for social studies, the authors advocate using subject related children's literature as one strategy to extend the social studies curriculum (Davis and Palmer, 125). Using children's literature to teach social studies can make historic events and people more meaningful to students by providing activities and enhancing student participation and experiences. It also serves to address a more holistic approach to teaching.

The strategy suggested for incorporating children's literature into the social studies curriculum contains six-steps: state social studies objectives, read social studies textbook selection that addresses the stated objectives, examine the potential sources of literature that supplement the textbook, plan how literature can best be incorporated, incorporate the selected literature into the lesson, and assess effectiveness of instruction and skill attainment. The authors believe the 6-step strategy offers a wealth of resources that will extend the existing curriculum and lead the students to a higher level of thinking (Davis and Palmer, 128).

I have been observing teachers that use children's literature in their language arts curriculums. While I have yet to observe a social studies class, I am hoping and partly assuming that similar holistic approaches, such as Davis and Palmer's six-step strategy, are being incoporated within the social studies. I have not seen an infusion of the social studies/history into the

language arts programs I have observed. I believe that as social studies has not been a favorite subject of many students, it needs to be integrated within the curriculum, particularly within the language arts. Children's literature can enliven the subject for students. I also see the flexibility Davis and Palmer's six-step strategy could add to the language arts and social studies curriculum. This flexibility can aid in the inclusion of learning impaired students and enhance the learning experience of children with different ability levels.

Using Informal Writing in Large History Classes: Helping Students to Find Interest and Meaning in History.

Many middle school, high school and even college history students often think that studying history is dull and meaningless and has nothing to do with their own lives. This is what author Henry Steffens has noticed as a history teacher. Steffens supports the use of informal journal writing as a cure for lack of enthusiasm, lack of understanding, and ambivalent attitudes in history classes.

When writing informally to learn history, students become interested in the topic and search for meaning (Steffens, 107). Steffens supports the informal journal writing teaching technique by citing college classroom situations that involve the use of informal writing and by providing student comments on the results. He also acknowledges that the technique can be adapted for use at any age/grade level.

Some of the benefits of informal journal writing proposed are the following: journal writing forces students to be active rather than passive learners, it is a way to keep students involved, students become more alert listeners, it helps them make meaningful connections to their lives and to related topics and other classes (Steffens, 108).

While reading this article, I automatically translated the whole idea of informal journal writing in history into "elementary" thinking. As with the other articles, I found that most innovative ideas for upper grade history classes can be devised to fit in the elementary grade level.

I reflected on the idea that many children grow up thinking that history is boring and meaningless. Many adults think of history as being their worst subject during their K-8 years. Not until I was in an inspiring teacher's world history class did I find history to be exciting. It is time to introduce

history both as an exciting subject and as it pertains to children's lives. Journal writing early in children's educational years can be one form of introduction. Writing informally about what they learned in their history instruction, how they felt, and especially on how it pertains to them gives children an early start in understanding their connection with history. It also provides children with the writing, study skills, and confidence that they will need in middle school, high school and college history classes. Informal journal writing is already happening in elementary classrooms. Guiding the children with journal topics that pertain to history and the social studies can be used as one step toward integrating language arts and history.

Students as Historians----Writing Their School's History

This article tells about the process students go through when writing their own book for study. Within this process students acquire a heightened awareness of their heritage along with a mastery of skills. The skills include reading, interviewing, researching, collecting data, organizing materials, writing and editing. Such a project incorporates things learned in the language arts and the social sciences.

The article explains the steps taken for writing the school's history. The students prepared a blueprint by doing things such as surveying old school and community publications. They then constructed an outline of categories. From the outline, they developed a research plan. The next steps were to schedule regular meeting for research updates, gathering photos, school memorabilia and anecdotes, organizing material and selecting photos, writing, editing, contacting printers for samples of their work and bids, selecting a printer and sending materials to the printer, preparing brochures and media announcements if the publication is to be sold, proof, check the layout and design, print, market and distribute (Fazio, 64).

The steps taken to write a school history put into practice all of the skills learned in English/ language arts and History/social studies classes. The project was a great success which provided practical application of many of their skills.

The example of high school aged students writing their own school history is beneficial to elementary and middle school teachers because the main idea of writing a history is adaptable. For example, a third grade class may learn to keep a historical record of their year in a scrapbook by collecting data, taking pictures, writing, and recording. A fourth grade class may want to

write a history of their "California School" and "desk top" publish it. There are many adaptations of the articles subject on a smaller scale. This article made me reflect on more ways to approach integrating history and language arts.

Using a Literature-Based Approach to Teaching Social Studies.

This article reports on an effort to develop, implement and evaluate a literature based approach to social studies. The team, made up of a sixth-grade classroom teacher, a professor of content reading, and a teacher educator in social studies, collaborated on the preparation, instruction and assessment of a single unit taught without a textbook, using only children's literature and literature based instruction (Guzzetti, Kowalinski, and McGowan 114).

The groups theory was based on the idea that textbooks are generally incomprehensible. Their rationale came from research of textbooks and the criticisms that these texts lack relevant meaning. In contrast to textbooks, literature, or "trade and real books" were incoporated as part of the instructional program in the social studies experiment (Guzzetti, Kowalinski, and McGowan 114).

The group chose China as their theme for the literature-based unit. They then discovered that they could use real books to replace a textbook, and still accomplish the district's curriculum goals. They designed and continually refined their instructional program by capitalizing on students interests and curiosity about China. Also, addressing students prior knowledge on China aided in structuring the direction and focus of the unit. Eventually, everything the students learned became personally meaningful instruction fueled by their own curiosity (Guzzetti, Kowalinski and McGowan 117).

Findings from the assessments given to the children on the different effects between the textbook only and literature only approaches support that children can acquire a greater understanding and grasp more concepts

through the literature-based approach to social studies instruction (Guzzetti, Kowalinski and McGowan 121).

The article was much more theoretical than the other four articles that I read. It placed another feather in the cap of the whole language approach and supported the importance of integrating subjects in a curriculum. While it seems that after the experiment, history and the social studies were still rated the least favorite subject for the students in this study, the authors point out that the children did not recognize the China unit as the social studies since the text was not used. Their attitudes toward the traditional idea of social studies remained negative, while their attitudes toward the China unit were positive.

This article has reinforced my belief in teaching history through integration with the language arts. This approach should begin at the elementary level. That way, children will learn early on that history is relative, inspiring and interesting.

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